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SUBJECT: VP MAHDI DISCUSSES SARKOZY VISIT, CONCERNS ABOUT MALIKI, AND ELECTION RESULTS IN AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL MEETING

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. On February 10, Ambassador Crocker held a farewell meeting with Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi during which they discussed the visit of French President Nicholas Sarkozy, Mahdi's concern that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is "monopolizing" power, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq's (ISCI) reaction to its poor performance in the recent provincial elections, and resolving the dispute in parliament about selecting a new Speaker. End Summary.

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French President Nicholas Sarkozy's Commits to Iraq  
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¶2. (C) Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi said he was extremely pleased with French President Sarkozy's February 10 visit to Baghdad because Sarkozy expressed his commitment to leading Europe in stronger engagement with Iraq. Sarkozy promised a renewed development and business relationship and he distanced himself from France's past policies toward Iraq, and had conveyed an invitation to President Talabani for a state visit in 2009.

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Mahdi's Greatest Worry: Maliki's Accumulation of Power  
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¶3. (C) When asked what worries him most about Iraq' future, Mahdi said (again) it was Maliki's "monopolization" of power. Mahdi said Maliki is using whatever means he can -- legal or illegal -- to control Iraq, and if Iraq continues down this path "take my word, the entire project will be lost," potentially devolving into a strongman state like Egypt. Ambassador urged that Iraqi leaders focus on developing Iraq's institutions and put less emphasis on personalities, and reminded Mahdi that structures are in place through the Iraqi Constitution to limit the authority of any prime minister. Mahdi retorted that Iraq's ills are about good/bad leadership, not just whether proper institutions are in place. If you have power you can manipulate institutions, said Mahdi. The Presidency Council has tried to convene meetings with Maliki, Mahdi said, but it did not work well.

¶4. (C) Mahdi predicted that Maliki would "put all his weight" to stop Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) member Ayad Summarie from becoming the next COR speaker, which would be another example of him exerting undo influence. Mahdi said the Presidency Council issued a neutral statement today urging parliament to quickly resolve the speaker issue. Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, Mahdi said, wanted the statement to be more aggressive (presumably in favor of IIP).

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Mahdi Surprised By Elections, But Quickly Accepted Defeat  
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¶5. (C) Ambassador praised the public acceptance by Mahdi and

the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) of the provincial election results. Crocker said such immediate and clear signal of accepting defeat will improve Iraq's democratic process and has paved the way for incumbents in the provincial governments to peacefully cede authority to the newly elected officials. Mahdi acknowledged that he never thought ISCI would fare so poorly, but, soon after the results became apparent, he wrote a statement accepting the elections to prevent others in ISCI from protesting the results. Mahdi claimed Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and Ammar al-Hakim prepared a different post-election statement that Qal-Hakim prepared a different post-election statement that was less conciliatory, but they (and other ISCI leaders) eventually agreed upon Mahdi's statement.

¶6. (C) Mahdi predicted that the Unified Iraqi Alliance (UIA) will continue but that Maliki and his loyalists will try to more aggressively push their own ideas within the Shia alliance. How Maliki's State of Law forms the new provincial governments will signal how UIA will cooperate into the future, Mahdi said.

¶7. (C) Although ISCI has lost influence in the southern provinces it will still encourage decentralization as a matter of principle, said Mahdi, even though doing so will not directly benefit the party. "We will wait four years," said Mahdi, and hope for a better showing. ISCI is a very organized and large party, Mahdi said, so it will remain strong.

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